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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 005140

SIPDIS

DEFENSE ALSO FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY
BAGHDAD ALSO FOR DCM JEFFREY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKS SEEK AVENUE TO GET HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
TO TALAFAR, REITERATE CONCERNS RE CASUALTIES AND ETHNIC
BALANCE

REF: A. ANKARA 5117

[1](#)B. ANKARA 5100

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Turkey urgently seeks first-hand access to Talafar to evaluate the situation there to provide humanitarian assistance to this predominantly Turkmen Iraqi city, MFA Undersecretary-designate Tuygan told the Ambassador on Sept. 13. GOT continues to be concerned about getting accurate casualty figures, the alleged presence of peshmerga units in the city, and the ethnic future of not only Talafar, but the entire Ninewah province. GOT is taking a moderate public line, but is feeling pressure from the Turkish people and an unhelpful press. Our facilitation of Turkish humanitarian aid would take pressure off the GOT and head off its contemplating steps harmful to our efforts in Iraq. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) MFA Undersecretary-designate Ali Tuygan called in Ambassador Sept. 13 to discuss the situation in Talafar (see refs). Ambassador informed Tuygan that the USG was fully apprised at very high levels of Turkish concerns regarding this predominantly Turkmen city. Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz had also informed Ambassador that he had agreed to the Turkish request for a POC to help coordinate the Turkish effort to get humanitarian supplies into the city.

[1](#)3. (C) U/S Tuygan said he appreciated the Ambassador's readout, but reiterated several Turkish concerns. First, he claimed that the Talafar region had been a peaceful one until the latest round of operations. He noted reports that about 200 insurgents had entered the city, and questioned whether the magnitude of force that the coalition had applied was necessary for what he termed a relatively small number of insurgents. Tuygan repeated GOT concerns (see ref a) about the presence of peshmerga (in Iraqi uniform), and highlighted the GOT's sensitivity about peshmerga operations in Talafar.

[1](#)4. (C) Finally, Tuygan added that the GOT was having a hard time getting a clear report from the ground on the situation in Talafar, including accurate casualty figures, since the Turkish Special Forces in the area do not have access to the city. (Note: According to Task Force Olympia's LNO to the Turkish military in northern Iraq, it is the Turkish military itself which has ordered its SF in Talafar to hunker down near the airport and not to venture into town. End note.) Without first-hand knowledge, Tuygan said, the GOT is forced to rely on U.S. reports, its own limited intelligence reporting, and reports from Turkmen sources. (Comment: Some Turkmen sources have wildly exaggerated civilian casualty figures to the Turkish press, and the Iraqi Turkmen Front's representative in Ankara has made extremely unhelpful comments to the press, characterizing the coalition operation as "genocide" and as a bid to wrest Talafar from Turkmen control and hand it over to the Kurds. End comment.) Ambassador noted that the Turkish LNOs at Task Force Olympia HQ in Mosul are receiving full briefings on the operation, but Tuygan responded that the GOT was seeking first-hand reports.

[1](#)5. (C) On the Turkish effort to send humanitarian assistance to Talafar, Tuygan reported that the Turkish Embassy in Baghdad had contacted the IIG's Acting Foreign Minister, who had agreed to the Embassy's request to provide Turkish assistance to the city. According to Tuygan, the minister referred the embassy to the Governor of Mosul for "practical arrangements." Tuygan reiterated the need for Turkish LNOs to gain access to Talafar in order to assess the humanitarian needs there and report to Ankara.

[1](#)6. (C) Tuygan then turned to Turkish concerns regarding the future of Talafar's ethnic makeup. He requested that by no means should U.S. forces withdraw and leave peshmerga in charge of the city. He said that for the GOT, the ethnic makeup of Talafar was related to its concerns that Kurds are attempting to shift the ethnic balance in Kirkuk in their favor. Tuygan said the Turks do not want ethnic strife to come to Talafar. MFA Deputy DG for the Middle East Safak Gokturk added that Turkey was concerned that Talafar could

now be seen by those Kurds who are now seeking to disrupt Kirkuk as a soft target, a place where the ethnic balance in Iraq could be shifted. The entire province of Ninewah could be in play, he said.

17. (C) Ambassador made three main points in response to Tuygan. First, since we are dealing with a real-time battlefield situation, we should be cautious about claims made in the press, especially those by organizations such as the ITF. He cited outlandish reports in the Turkish press, such as that 95% of the city had been destroyed. Ambassador noted the care that coalition troops took to spare the civilian population, and also cited our own preliminary estimates of anywhere from 12-20 civilians killed and 20-50 wounded. He added that Iraqi doctors had reported that most of the injuries seemed to be from mortar (e.g., insurgent) fire, flying debris, and indirect fire.

18. (C) Second, Ambassador rejected Tuygan's claim that coalition use of force was disproportionate to the threat ("only" 200 or so insurgents). He noted that the USG and GOT share the goal of returning full sovereignty to the Iraqis, and that by rooting out the insurgency the coalition was seeking to help the IIG assert its authority. Najaf and Fallujah regrettably showed that it only takes a relatively small number of insurgents to cause widespread disorder, noting reports that up to 50,000 people fled Talafar when the insurgents moved in, well in advance of the coalition operation there. He reminded Tuygan of what life had been like in Najaf under Muqtada al-Sadr.

19. (C) Third, Ambassador addressed the issue of ethnic balance. He said there have been no widespread attempts by Kurds to take over Turkmen houses or flood the city with Kurds. Moreover, coalition forces have set up control checkpoints in and around Talafar to deter any such attempts. Ambassador also pointed out that there are in fact no peshmerga units in Talafar, though there are some Iraqi Kurds in ING forces there. Finally, Ambassador said he is working closely with Washington and Baghdad to ensure that everyone understands the extreme sensitivity that surrounds the ethnic make-up of Talafar's new civilian administration.

110. (C) Tuygan responded that the current situation in Talafar should not be viewed in isolation. The GOT is concerned that the Turkmen are dissatisfied with their participation in the new Iraq, and complained that first CPA and now the IIG have made insufficient efforts to recruit Turkmen into the ING. Perhaps if this had happened, Tuygan mused, local Talafar authorities could have defended themselves better against the insurgents in the first place.

111. (C) Ambassador responded that we understand that the Turkmen of Talafar have generally tried to avoid being drawn into the conflict, that the town's residents were primarily merchants, not fighters, and for that very reason was vulnerable to the insurgency.

112. (C) Tuygan took the Ambassador's point regarding irresponsible statements by the ITF, and added that in its own statements the GOT has tried to be balanced and to point out that the battle in Talafar is neither between the U.S. and Turkey nor the U.S. and the Turkmen people. He reiterated his point that for the GOT, getting humanitarian assistance to Talafar and accessing the city were of greatest importance now. Ambassador repeated our offer to assist on both scores.

113. (C) Comment: While it is true that at times the Turks have invoked the Turkmen minority in Iraq as a wedge to insert its own interests there, Turkish public opinion regarding the Turkmen is of genuine concern, especially when paired with the press asking why the U.S. military will exert such an effort to root out 200 insurgents but will not take action against the PKK, a terrorist organization responsible for the death of thousands of innocent Turkish civilians over the years. The GOT has sought to take a moderate stance, but it must demonstrate to the Turkish people that it is capable of helping the Turkmen. Our facilitation of Turkish efforts to get humanitarian assistance to Talafar is therefore essential, as it will take pressure off the GOT and preclude its consideration of steps detrimental to our efforts in Iraq. End comment.

114. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN